



## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NORTH CAROLINA

### LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

July 12, 2008

#### THE STATE BUDGET

*>From the NC Justice Center:*

##### **STATE BUDGET: Positive Investments in NC's Working Families**

The state budget is done. We're disappointed to see the increase of the state Earned Income Tax Credit postponed until next year, and it is important lawmakers fulfill this promise in 2009 (sadly, there's nothing obligating them to do so). However, state legislators are making some important investments in this budget.

Here are the highlights:

- Public Education -- increases of \$6.2 million for the education of children with disabilities and \$6 million for the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund. Also, the state will invest \$15 million (up from \$7 million) in dropout prevention grants and will give schools \$30 million to help cover the high cost of diesel fuel.
- Community Colleges -- \$23.8 million to fully cover the costs of the unexpectedly large enrollment growth of last semester, and \$2.5 million in reserve funds to help pay for high enrollment in the coming semester. Plus, \$4 million to fund the college's high-cost allied health programs, which are in high demand.
- Child-care Subsidies -- \$4.9 million to provide subsidies for 1,110 of the more than 30,000 children currently on the waiting list.
- NC Health Choice -- \$9.4 million to open this health insurance program to 7,341 more low-income children.
- Foreclosure Prevention -- \$3 million to expand to all 100 counties the Home Protection Pilot Program, which provides loans to displaced workers so they can keep their homes, and \$200,000 for legal assistance to help low-income homeowners avoid foreclosure.
- Affordable Housing -- increases the recurring allocation to the Housing Trust Fund, which finances the construction and rehabilitation of affordable homes, by \$2 million to \$10 million annually.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

*>From Chase Foster, Voters for Clean Elections Coalition Update: July 11, 2008:*

There are no BIG pushes for new campaign finance reform initiatives this year at the state legislature, but several small but significant initiatives still have been heard during this year's

short session. Here's a quick update and summary of some of the key bills (but by no means is this comprehensive).

### **SB1263: Election Law Amendments**

With a long title that is 200 words, this bill includes a hodge-podge of election law and campaign finance reform changes. The coalition supports the overall bill and advocated for several of the bill's provisions.

Perhaps the most exciting thing contained within the bill is the creation of an Elections Law Oversight Committee, which would be charged with researching election and campaign finance law year round (meeting once or twice a month). This committee will give us an opportunity to study Voter-Owned Elections more thoroughly and allow additional legislators to become involved in the program's development. Plus, this joint committee will create a space for the House and Senate to work together on these issues.

Other sections of SB-1263 supported by the coalition include statutory updates that comply with recent 4th circuit and Supreme Court decisions, a ban on the commingling of funds (i.e. mixing together money from different accounts), and a requirement for 48 hour reporting of late contributions of \$1,000 or more that come from any source (right now the requirement is only for political committees).

This bill was given a favorable report by both the House Election Law and Campaign Finance Reform Committee and House Judiciary 1. It was approved on second reading in the House Thursday by a vote of 95-15. If approved on third reading in the House next week it will be sent to the Senate for concurrence.

*Note from Bev Kawalec, Advocacy Chair, LWVNC:* This bill also reauthorizes the pilot program initiated in a previous legislative session for Instant Runoff Voting in selected local jurisdictions.

### **SB488: Carrboro Campaign Regulation**

This local enabling bill gives the town of Carrboro the ability to lower contribution limits for town elections to \$250.

Reform advocates say the measure will help preserve the affordability of running for office and prevent the influence of big money from creeping into the town's elections. They said candidates for town office (mayor and Board of Aldermen) typically spend between \$3,000 and \$5,000, so a \$250 limit fits the size and scope of elections in the town.

In Chapel Hill, where a similarly sized lower limit has been in place for years, reform supporters say the ban has helped keep the cost of running for office down and discouraged special interest money. While some nearby municipalities have seen skyrocketing election costs and races for

mayor in the hundreds of thousands, Chapel Hill elections have stayed affordable and grassroots-oriented. Let's hope the same thing happens in Chapel Hill

A version of this bill has been approved by the House and Senate, but because of some technical differences, the Senate did not concur with the House version. A final bill is being worked out in a conference committee.

### **HB2436 (2008 Budget)**

The recently approved budget included some new appropriations for the State Board of Elections and full funding for North Carolina's Voter-Owned Elections programs. Way to go state budget writers!

### **HEALTH CARE**

HB 2688 has been renamed from An Act to Establish the Bill Martin and Ruth Easterling Health Policy Council (short title: Health Policy Council) to The NC Institute of Medicine Access to Health Care Study Group. It is encountering some opposition.

#### ***>From the NC Justice Center:***

It appears the powerful health industry is trying to kill Rep. Verla Insko's bill creating a Health Policy Council. This council would serve as a forum for all interested parties to come up with a North Carolina-style plan to make sure everyone in the state can afford to buy health coverage. Rep. Insko presented the bill in the House Health Committee last week, but it was not voted on, and, if the health industry has its way, the bill won't come up again. Quality, affordable health care is a number-one priority for many people in North Carolina who are struggling to make it through the economic downturn. At a time like this, squashing a great idea for getting people to sit down and talk about solutions makes little sense.

The Legislative Update is compiled by Beverly Kawalec, Advocacy Chair for the North Carolina League of Women Voters ([bevkawalec@bellsouth.net](mailto:bevkawalec@bellsouth.net)). If you wish to unsubscribe, please email Patty Dale at [daleph55@gmail.com](mailto:daleph55@gmail.com).